

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
Civil Rights Performance Plan and Self-Assessment Report
Fiscal Year 2003**

Goal	Performance Objective	Indicators	Outcomes
1 <u>Accountability</u> : Incorporate the USDA Civil Rights policy throughout Agency operations to ensure that customers and employees are treated fairly and equitably, with dignity and respect.	1.1 Hold managers, supervisors, and other employees accountable for ensuring that USDA's customers and employees are treated in accordance with USDA's Civil Rights policy.	<p>1.1.1 The Agency displays commitment to USDA's Civil Rights goals in its strategic plan.</p> <p>1.1.2 Managers' performance standards mandate actions that: X Implement the Agency's Civil Rights program objectives, X Integrate Civil Rights principles throughout the Agency's programs and operations, and X Ensure an environment free of discrimination.</p>	<p>NRCS is committed to providing equitable service to all customers. NRCS is responsible for delivering its programs to all citizens in this country, and that responsibility flows through agreements and contracts to everywhere Federal dollars are involved. NRCS and all of its partners are committed to this responsibility, from meetings with landowners to delivery of services.</p> <p>NRCS' Strategic and Business Plans include specific measurable goals, objectives, and action items that address equal opportunity in program delivery. The plans established specific outreach goals and objectives to small farmers, limited resource farmers, minorities, women, and other traditionally underserved groups.</p> <p>NRCS strategic plan also includes critical human capital initiatives that will allow NRCS to effectively recruit manage and maintain a diverse workforce that is highly motivated, skilled, flexible, and technologically adept.</p> <p>All employees' performance standards provide for civil rights accountability as required under the Agency's Performance Appraisal System. The Computerized Automated Management System (CAMS) automatically generates a civil rights performance element for all employees.</p> <p>Position descriptions and performance standards reflect the responsibilities of employees in carrying out civil rights compliance requirements for program delivery.</p> <p>Standards for new employees are put in place within 30 days of entering duty. Performance standards for all employees reflect required language as mandated by Agency policy. NRCS annual performance appraisals for managers and</p>

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		<p>1.1.3 The Agency ensures that all employees' performance standards provide for civil rights accountability.</p> <p>1.1.4 The Agency takes appropriate disciplinary or corrective action when a case file or other evidence indicates: X Discrimination, X Misconduct related to Civil Rights violations other than findings of discrimination, and reprisals.</p>	<p>supervisors include an element evaluating them on their compliance and commitment to Civil Rights and Equal Employment Opportunity.</p> <p>The Chief of NRCS has established a zero tolerance policy that mandates all employees, prospective employees, customers, and prospective customers provide a positive and professional work environment free from discrimination on the bases of their race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital or family status, political beliefs, parental status, or protected genetic information.</p> <p>NRCS established Part 402 of the General Manual (GM) that requires appropriate disciplinary and/or corrective actions are taken for those employees who engage in discriminatory behavior or civil rights related misconduct. Managers and supervisors are held accountable for failure to take appropriate action in response to any findings of discrimination, reprisal, civil rights violations, or related misconduct. When there is a finding of discrimination or misconduct, procedures are established whereby the Civil Rights Staff and the Human Resources Office coordinates with the appropriate supervisor regarding appropriate punishment for the offender.</p> <p>NRCS considers Civil Rights to be a major priority within the Agency.</p>

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<p>2. <u>Program Delivery</u>: Ensure all customers equal access and equal treatment in the delivery of USDA programs and services.</p>	<p>2.1 Deliver Agency programs in compliance with Civil Rights laws and with Departmental regulations, policy, and goals.</p>	<p>2.1.1 The Agency conducts compliance review of federally –assisted and –conducted programs in accordance with Departmental guidelines.</p> <p>2.1.2 The Agency: X Identifies deficiencies, and X Implements preventive and corrective measures to address deficiencies found as a result of compliance reviews.</p>	<p>During FY 2003, the Civil Rights Staff conducted compliance reviews in 11 States to assess NRCS’ compliance with equal opportunity laws and regulations regarding program delivery. The States were North Carolina, Texas, Wisconsin, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Alaska, Kentucky, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Missouri, and Oregon.</p> <p>In addition, in FY 2003, NRCS States offices conducted over 600 Civil Rights compliance reviews of their field offices. Corrective action plans to correct violations resulting from these reviews are provided to the Civil Rights Staff during State compliance reviews.</p> <p>Civil Rights resources and performance data for programs and activities administered by NRCS (Title VI, which includes Limited English Proficiency (LEP); Title IX; and civil rights statutes) consist of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1,862,300 was allocated to enforce civil rights activities; • NRCS has approximately 394 full-time equivalent (FTE) assigned to civil rights activities; • 21 Federally assisted programs and activities administered by NRCS are covered by Title VI; • \$665,490,694 of financial assistance was provided for federally assisted programs and activities administered by NRCS; and • 173, 060 recipients of financial assistance were covered by Title VI. • Civil Rights pre-award reviews of Federally-assisted programs and activities administered by NRCS (covering Title VI) accounted for 5,143 grants for recipients of Federal financial assistance.

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		<p>2.1.3 The Agency: X Conducts effective Civil Rights Impact Analyses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Rights post-award reviews of Federally-assisted programs and activities administered by NRCS (covering Title VI) accounted for 612 for recipients of Federal financial assistance. • There was a total of 64 FTE's devoted to post-award reviews. <p>Deficiencies found during compliance reviews required corrective action plans to be submitted within 30 days of the closeout of the review to the Civil Rights Staff or State, as appropriate. Updates are submitted every 90 days until all noncompliance items are corrected. Corrective action plans are monitored by the Civil Rights Staff and the States to ensure that deficiencies are corrected and complied with in a timely manner. Most noncompliance items are corrected on-site. In FY 2003, the Civil Rights Staff received corrective action plans from all eleven States reviewed that included 93 items to be corrected. Seventy percent of the deficiencies have been corrected.</p> <p>NRCS conducts Civil Rights Impact Analyses (CRIA) of all new and revised Agency programs, charters, and reorganizations to identify adverse implications for minorities, women, or persons with disabilities. In addition, the Chief NRCS has directed a member of the Civil Rights Staff be a core member of all taskforces engaged in conservation program development and implementation, reorganizations and other major Agency activities.</p> <p>A CRIA was conducted for the following NRCS programs and activities during FY 03:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) • Agricultural Air Quality Task Force (AAQTF) • Competitive Sourcing (CS)

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		<p>X Develops Limited English Proficiency Plans, as required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of Private Grazing Lands (CPGL) • Conservation Security Program (CSP) • Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) • Farmland Protection Program (FPP) • Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) • Highly Erodible Land and Wetlands Conservation (HEL/WC) • Technical Service Provider (TSP) • NRCS/NHQ Reorganization Proposal <p>As a result of the analyses, program changes were implemented by the Agency to mitigate potential negative impacts for protected group members. For example under EQIP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost share payments were increased from a maximum of 75 percent to up to 90 percent for Limited Resource Farmers and for small and beginning farmers and ranchers. • The “buy down” practice where a producer could accept lower percentages of cost share and thus be awarded additional points and gain an advantage in the application approval process is disallowed. This practice favored the larger more affluent producers. <p>NRCS has incorporated in the Agency’s General Manual the requirement that all Federally conducted and Federally assisted programs be accessible equally to all individuals regardless of their national origin or their ability to speak and understand the English language. Communication strategies are implemented through outreach efforts to underserved communities. This includes contracting interpreted services, producing multi-language informational brochures and videos, and establishing new programs. NRCS liaisons are positioned throughout</p>

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			the agency to address and distribute information to local media resources in various languages, brochures, and videos.
	2.2 Maintain an effective process for handling Civil Rights program complaints.	<p>2.2.1 The Agency promptly implements preventive and corrective actions resulting from complaint findings.</p> <p>2.2.2 The Agency promptly implements terms of conciliation agreements.</p> <p>2.2.3 The Agency analyzes trends in complaints promptly implementing changes to avoid future complaints and ensure nondiscrimination.</p>	<p>A zero tolerance policy combined with clear performance expectations and substantive training and awareness tools have effectively deterred discriminatory conduct within the Agency. Fiscal Year data reflects two cases requiring corrective action due to employment related Civil Rights violations. Corrective action has been implemented due to evidence of misconduct in one case.</p> <p>While in another case, corrective action is planned and underway as a result of a finding of discrimination. Lastly, there has been no finding of discrimination or evidence of Civil Rights violations related to program delivery for the fiscal year.</p> <p>Conciliation agreements are monitored for implementation within the required timeframe. Once the implementation is complete and the complainant is notified and a letter is provided to the responsible agency closing the case. For FY 2003 the Agency entered into one conciliation agreement.</p> <p>Quarterly reports are generated and analyzed identifying patterns of possible discriminatory actions in each State. If a pattern is identified and there is an appearance of discrimination, a meeting is conducted that may result in an investigation, compliance review and/or discussion with State officials reviewing and providing corrective measures to ensure equality.</p>

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	2.3 Improve service delivery to historically underserved populations.	<p>2.3.1 The Agency: X Creates mechanisms to improve service to underserved populations, X Establishes specific goals, and X Identifies new priorities and accomplishments.</p> <p>2.3.2 The Agency: X Identifies barriers to participation for underserved groups X Takes affirmative steps to remove barriers, and increases program participation and service delivery.</p> <p>2.3.3 The Agency increases outreach and</p>	<p>NRCS has set a performance goal that by FY 2008, 467,000 members of minority, underserved, and nontraditional groups will receive NRCS conservation assistance annually to help them plan and apply conservation on their lands and the lands that they manage. In FY 2002 (Data for FY2003 will be available after November 1, 2003), a total of 418,991 minority customers were served.</p> <p>By FY 2008, 150,000 women who are primary operators of an agricultural operation will receive technical assistance in planning or applying conservation on their operations. In FY 2002 (FY 2003 data will be available after November 1, 2003), a total of 144,271 women who were primary operators of an agricultural operation were served.</p> <p>NRCS engages in data collection to analyze the actual or potential impacts its programs may have on members of protected groups. Conclusions drawn from various analyses enable program managers to provide targeted outreach efforts in an attempt to mitigate any adverse impacts.</p> <p>Table 1 below compares 1997 Agriculture Census data identifying the number of eligible agricultural producers in the United States and U.S. Territories to the number of producers actually receiving services from NRCS. The Agriculture Census data identifies the number of women and minorities that are potentially affected.</p> <p>Table 2 below shows the number of applicants by RSNOD (Race, Sex, National Origin, and Disability) for NRCS conservation programs providing cost share, the</p>

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		improves service delivery to underserved populations with: X Outside groups, X Minority-serving institutions, and X Community-based organizations.	<p>number and percentage of applicants approved for cost share, and the amount and percentage of cost share dollars received by applicants</p> <table><tr><th colspan="8">Table 1: FY 2003 PRMS Parity Report by Demographics***</th></tr><tr><th>Race</th><th>American Indian</th><th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th><th>Black</th><th>Hispanic</th><th>White</th><th>Females</th><th>Total</th></tr><tr><td>Census (#)</td><td>10,629</td><td>8,647</td><td>18,435</td><td>27,360</td><td>1,814,326</td><td>164,883</td><td>1,910,247</td></tr><tr><td>Service (%)</td><td>2,170</td><td>824</td><td>2,980</td><td>3,795</td><td>252,035</td><td>33,550</td><td>262,205</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>(20%)</td><td>(9%)</td><td>(16%)</td><td>(14%)</td><td>(14%)</td><td>(20%)</td><td>(14%)</td></tr><tr><td>Disparity</td><td>N/A</td><td>N/A</td><td>N/A</td><td>N/A</td><td>N/A</td><td>N/A</td><td></td></tr></table> <p>*** PRMS Parity Report, as of August 18, 2003</p> <p>Table 1 shows that there are 1,910,247 producers eligible to participate in NRCS conservation programs. As of August 18, 2003, with the exception of Asian Americans/Pacific Islander producers, females and minorities received services from NRCS at rates equal to or exceeding the rate of service provided to White males (13 percent – not listed on the table). NRCS provided services to 20 percent of eligible American Indian producers, 9 percent of eligible Asian American/Pacific Islander producers, 16 percent of eligible Black producers, 14 percent of eligible Hispanic producers, and 20 percent of eligible female producers. The fourth row shows that there is no disparity in the services rendered by NRCS to White males as compared to females and all minority groups. Parity is achieved when services provided by NRCS to a protected group is at a rate of 10 percent or less of the rate of services provided to White males.</p> <table><tr><th colspan="7">Table 2: Minority, Women, and Persons with Disabilities Participation in NRCS Conservation Programs for FY 2002**</th></tr><tr><th>Group</th><th>#</th><th>#</th><th>%</th><th>Dollars</th><th>%</th><th>%</th></tr><tr><th>Representation</th><th>Applicants</th><th>Applicant Approved</th><th>Applicants Approved</th><th>Received</th><th>Dollars Received</th><th>Eligible Producers</th></tr></table>	Table 1: FY 2003 PRMS Parity Report by Demographics***								Race	American Indian	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black	Hispanic	White	Females	Total	Census (#)	10,629	8,647	18,435	27,360	1,814,326	164,883	1,910,247	Service (%)	2,170	824	2,980	3,795	252,035	33,550	262,205		(20%)	(9%)	(16%)	(14%)	(14%)	(20%)	(14%)	Disparity	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		Table 2: Minority, Women, and Persons with Disabilities Participation in NRCS Conservation Programs for FY 2002**							Group	#	#	%	Dollars	%	%	Representation	Applicants	Applicant Approved	Applicants Approved	Received	Dollars Received	Eligible Producers
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			American Indian	775	439	56.6	17,437,583	3.0	.70
			Asian/Pacific Islander	217	77	35.5	1,969,604	.34	.26
			African American	3,406	2,879	84.5	3,374,545	.58	1.1
			Hispanic	1,160	579	49.9	7,154,981	1.2	1.6
			Others	433	432	99.7	11,248,881	1.95	N/A
			Females	13,582	7,789	57.3	53,232,373	9.27	13.4
			White Male	74,443	23,156	31.1	479,778,672	93.55	96.2
			Disabilities	256	118	46.1	0	0	UNK
			Total	94,272	35,469	37.6	574,196,569		
			** PRMS Program Participation Report (All Programs), National Summary, October 1 through September 30, FY 2002						
			The data in Table 2 illustrate that in FY 2002 (Data for FY 2003 will be available after November 1, 2003), the rates of approvals for applications for cost share contracts from all protected groups exceeded the rate of approval for White male applicants. The last column of Table 2 shows the percentage of eligible producers by RSNO participating in NRCS programs (computed by dividing the number of producers serviced by NRCS in row two of Table 1 by the total number of producers receiving services from NRCS).						
			Only American Indians and Asian American/Pacific Islander producers received cost share dollars at rates exceeding their percentage of total eligible producers participating in NRCS programs (comparison of the last two columns in Table 2). The high percentage of cost share to American Indians is due to “recognized” tribal lands being designated by NRCS as environmental priority areas. Contracts for technical assistance on lands in priority areas are not competed against other funding requests and therefore receive 100 percent funding.						
			Revisions to NRCS’ conservation programs including an increase of cost share payments from a maximum of 75 percent to up to 90 percent of contract cost for						

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			<p>limited resource farmers starting in FY 2003 will significantly increase minority producers' ability to participate. Therefore, NRCS anticipates a spike in participation and the award of cost share payment to minority and female producers in FY 2003.</p> <p>To achieve established performance goals, NRCS has:</p> <p>Produced communications materials, such as multilingual publications, specifically targeted to reach underserved groups. <i>For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRCS Hawaii provides videos for applying conservation plans in English, Korean, and Ilocano in all of its field offices. • NRCS Connecticut developed brochures and flyers and distributed to Spanish speaking people outlining Farm Bill Program funding and opportunities. Informational brochures were also developed to use in the recruitment of Spanish speaking people. • NRCS California developed brochures in Spanish and several Asian languages describing Farm Bill Programs and distributed to its field and urban offices. • NRCS Oregon provides Limited English Proficiency (LEP) assistance to its Spanish-speaking producers. For example, interpreters were used in assisting a Hispanic landowner install an animal waste management system through EQIP, and in developing conservation plans for other Hispanic landowners.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Glacierland RC&D Council in Wisconsin and the NRCS Wisconsin Staff are using an EQIP educational grant to fund a project involving a series of workshops and demonstrations in Green Bay to help small scale Hmong farmers and other urban gardeners. The workshops were designed to help producers better understand local soil conditions, the use of soil testing and soil test reports, and the proper handling and application of nutrients and pesticides. The State provided translation service in the Hmong language. • NRCS Wisconsin provides resource assistance to Asian American/Pacific Islander chicken farm producers in Hart and Franklin counties. The Asian American Program Manager provided these producers Farm Bill 2002 information in an Asian language to reduce the language barrier. • NRCS provided funding to Puerto Rico to translate the Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning Technical Guidance into Spanish to help ensure broader assess and equal treatment in the delivery of USDA programs and services. • The Conservation Communication Staff develops and distributes publications and press releases in Spanish, along with all State Public Affair Specialists. Based upon the State and field level needs other materials are printed in other languages. The mediums used are radio, newspapers, brochures, CD-ROM and translators. • NRCS provided assistance at several USDA Farm Bill Forums by providing agency materials, fact sheets, and banners written in Hmong, Spanish, and Laotian, including interpreters and audio devices. This information was used

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			<p>particularly at the California and Puerto Rico (conducted primarily in Spanish) forums. As a result, persons speaking in the various languages were able to participate effectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NRCS is currently exploring various tools and options to develop an Agency-wide policy that mirrors Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for Persons with LEP". NRCS has developed an agency fact sheet and brochure on LEP. The fact sheet and brochure is 70% completed. <p>Worked with tribal governments to establish offices and assistance in delivery approaches that meets their needs. <i>For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NRCS Small Farms Coordinator partnered with the Intertribal Agricultural Council to host a two-day, on-Reservation Outreach Consultations on the Conservation Title. Consultations focused on NRCS programs and services at the United Indian Pueblo Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the Kwa Tuk Nuk Lodge on the Lalish and Kootenai Reservation in Montana. Eight tribal representatives were present at the United Indians Pueblo Center Albuquerque, and 50 tribal representatives were present at Lalish Kootenai Reservation in Montana. NRCS performed a Navajo Nation Consultation and site visit. The purpose was to consult with members of the Navajo Nation on their resource management problems, and find ways to get their Community College students interested and involved in natural resource management careers. There were over 420 participants from the Navajo Nation. NRCS Oklahoma set aside 10 percent (\$990,960) of its FY 2003 EQIP

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			<p>allocation to target American Indian and other underserved populations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRCS Nevada formed an Advisory Group made up of members of various Tribes to advise the State Conservationist on how to make the best decisions in providing service to “Indian Country.” The Advisory Group made significant recommendations on the FY 2002 Farm Bill regarding Limited Resource Farmers and the distribution of State funding allocation for Tribes. • NRCS Maine has four Tribal Liaisons who provided services to six Tribal groups. The staff serviced eight Tribal EQIP/WHIP contracts to continue to apply the scheduled practices. • NRCS Alaska provided soil survey data for land use planning and resource development in a 9 million acres survey area for Alaskan Native Tribes. • The NRCS Plant Materials Centers worked closely with American Indian Tribes in Kansas, Michigan, Montana, North Dakota, and New York on the propagation and cultivation of sweet grass which, is one of the culturally significant plants to American Indians. • The Georgia Golden Triangle RC&D provides assistance to the Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe with the value added agricultural produce processing project which will process vegetables and fruits under a Tribal label for resale at major grocery markets. • NRCS Montana is providing technical assistance to complete range/resource inventories on 1.5 million acres of grasslands located on 3 reservations in

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			<p>Montana in partnership efforts with Tribes and the BIA.</p> <p>Broadened and strengthened the conservation partnership. <i>For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NRCS has begun communication in the development of partnerships with public and private sector entities in alignment with the President's Competitive Sourcing Management Agenda. This was accomplished through the distribution of key agency information, i.e., comments on National Outreach Policy, Federal Register Notices and Proposed Rules on the Water Quality Task Force, Farmland Protection Program, Technical Services Provider Program, to name a few. NRCS has revised its partnership listing with an increase of 25 percent. NRCS Oklahoma has entered into cooperative agreements with the Oklahoma Landowners and Tenants Association, Langston University Grassland Center for Excellence, and the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council to conduct outreach meetings across Oklahoma, targeted to underserved populations. These cooperative agreements and other outreach activities resulted in a increase in the number of underserved customers that have applied for participation in the Farm Bill Programs for FY 2003. The NRCS National Design, Construction, and Soil Mechanics Center (NDCSMC) provided SCAN site maintenance to the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDCSMC provides membership on the Florida A&M University Industrial Advisory Council, and participated in the review of the Florida A&M Biological and Agricultural Systems Engineering Program's progress toward becoming an accredited engineering program. • The NRCS Conservation Engineering Division met with the faculty at Alcorn State University to review the progress of ongoing USDA funded research on modeling of soil erosion from truck crop operations. • The NRCS Watershed and Science Institute participated in a Women's Science Workshop in Raleigh, North Carolina to encourage middle school girls and minorities to pursue science careers. • Approximately 500 minority landowners were reached by workshops that were held in conjunction with the Arkansas Farm and Land Development Corporation Annual Conference, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Rural Life conference, and USDA 2501 program. The purpose of the workshop was to educate landowners and producers about USDA/NRCS programs. • NRCS Maryland is partnering with the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, USDA 1890 Liaison to develop a funding proposal to build capacity for minorities to become Technical Service Providers. • The South Coast Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council in California works closely with Southeast Asian farmers to improve traditional farming methods. The RC&D also works with the Natural

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			<p>Resources partnership for Youth Achievement which works with inner city schools to promote Natural Resources Conservation as a vocation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Florida, NRCS supports the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Council, Inc. (SFERC) that benefits the people of Florida by furthering Environmental and Economic Equity and Justice for Ecosystem Restoration throughout the 16 Southern Counties in Florida. SFERC provides a unified voice for economic and social concerns and solutions related to the environment and the conservation of Natural Resources. SFERC focus on the underserved, economically disadvantaged communities, including Environmental Justice and environmental and economic equity issues. • NRCS Kentucky provided \$7,500 and co-sponsored the Minority Farmers Conference at Kentucky State University. More than 100 farmers, and landowners from underserved communities representing various counties attended the conference. The conference provided participants an excellent opportunity to network between small limited resource farmers and agency personnel, to learn about the various Farm Bill Programs, and receive training via several demonstration projects. • At an Oregon Association of Conservation Districts' Annual Conference, NRCS Oregon provided Civil Rights training to the conservation districts that included a presentation on sexual harassment, the need for board diversity, outreach to non-traditional customers, public notification requirements, and reasonable accommodation as required by the America's Disability Act. • NRCS agreements with the National Association of RC&D Councils include

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			<p>formation of an underrepresented taskforce as a standing committee of the association. The committee member presented results of their study efforts at the RC&D Leadership Forum in February 2003. The taskforce made three recommendations to the National Association to increase participation by underrepresented groups at their July Board of Directors meeting. The task force also presented a plan to increase RC&D for women, minorities, and persons with disabilities at the National RC&D Conference held in July. Included at the conference was a session on Working with Tribes. Fifty-one attendees participated in the session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRCS conducted a RC&D Area Planning and Implementation course includes training on increasing diversity of RC&D Councils. RC&D Area Planning and Implementation course has been conducted in March, May, and June of 2003. Attendees included council members from the El Carribe, and El Atlantico RC&D Councils as well as members from the Orient applicant area. District Conservationists and NRCS State Office staff also attended the two-day training program. • The NRCS Southeast Region Conservationist and the NRCS Social Science Institute Director co-sponsored a successful grant of \$297,000 for an North Carolina A&T University professor to develop a project entitled, "Developing an Effective Community Based Organization Service Model." The project covers the Black Belt area located in the Southeast Region. <p>Incorporated equal delivery of services into annual plans of operation. <i>For example:</i></p>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NRCS Louisiana's Civil Rights Business Plan has six objectives for program delivery. Action items assist in outreach and program delivery to socially disadvantaged customers providing valuable information and technical assistance to small-scale limited resource and minority clientele. The Science and Technology Deputy Area, through agreement with the National Council for Science and Environment, developed strategies for NRCS and Minority Serving Institutions to enhance partnering efforts to improve outreach and delivery of technology. NRCS provided \$200,000 to Florida A&M University for its Water Quality Center of Excellence, \$300,000 to Langston University for its Grazing Lands Center of Excellence, and \$70,000 to North Carolina A&T for its Agricultural and Biosystems Program. <p>NRCS States, Territories, and the Pacific Basin are increasing program flexibility to allow innovative strategies using existing authorities to reach historically underserved landowners and land managers. <i>To illustrate:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In implementing EQIP under the new Farm Bill in 2003, North Carolina used a county allocation process based on resource need rather than past EQIP demand. This ensured that counties with a high percentage of traditionally underserved customers who may not have participated in past EQIP programs would have an equal opportunity to acquire EQIP cost share. EQIP ranking worksheet gives bonus points for limited resource and new/beginning farmers, as well as producers who have never had an EQIP contract awarded bonus points.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the past, ranking of program participants was done on a statewide and priority area basis. This resulted in small and limited resource farmers not being able to compete. In 2003, NRCS Kentucky established Pooling Areas using the 14 RC&D boundaries for ranking participants applications. This will result in landowners competing in smaller areas and with similar socio-economic and natural resource concerns. Thus increasing program participation. <p>NRCS used innovative outreach strategies to reach historically under served landowners and land managers, and seek new authorities including activities delineated below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program outreach plans are developed at the Regional, State and field levels to track program outreach accomplishments. Some States combine their outreach plans with their State Business Plans. Also, the Outreach Division and coordinators use the field Performance Resource Management System to capture varied achievements. This is monitored on a monthly basis through teleconferences held with the Regional Outreach Coordinators. The NRCS Outreach Division developed the Agency's first national outreach policy. The policy is in the final stages of management approval, whereas the policy will be distributed electronically by the end of August 2003. The NRCS Outreach Division is in the process of drafting Agency guidelines for conducting quarterly, national and local program outreach reviews, along with providing States with a review handbook. The review guidelines are 70% completed.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NRCS Outreach Division participated with the Agency's Civil Rights Staff on a coordinated-Civil Rights and Outreach Compliance Review in Portland, Oregon in August 2003. • NRCS provides financial support for the National Southern Christian Leadership annual conference. This effort is coordinated with the NRCS Conservation Communication Staff and meets the goals of working with faith-based organizations and agencies. • The NRCS Outreach Division coordinates on a monthly basis with the Regional Outreach Coordinators to provide advice and counsel to improve services to underserved communities. • NRCS continues to have outreach coordinators at the regional, State and field levels, in addition to the tribal liaisons and the Environmental Justice coordinators. • Currently, there are 5 Regional Outreach Coordinators, 54 Co-lateral State Outreach Coordinators, including the Pacific Basin and the Caribbean Area. • NRCS consults regularly with the Agency's National American Indian Liaison and the National Small Farms Coordinator on various Departmental and Agency initiatives in a coordinated-effort to improve the effectiveness of services and awareness to the underserved populations. • NRCS developed a national outreach exhibit (8'x10') for agency-wide awareness to be used at various meetings, conferences, trainings, recruitments

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			<p>and other outreach- related functions. The exhibit is 100% completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRCS participates in USDA outreach initiatives that involve improvements to underserved populations, in addition to developing new priorities, i.e. the USDA Black Farmer's Summit Planning Team, the USDA NAACP Work Group and the USDA Outreach Coordinators Committee. • NRCS developed the Program Outreach Assessment Team (POAT). This Team is composed of Agency program managers who meet with the Outreach Division to discuss issues that may or may not affect underserved populations, small and limited resource farmers, in the areas of program delivery, program participation and awareness. Such programs of focus are the WRP, EQIP, Conservation Reserve Program, WHIP, etc. The POAT is 100% completed. • In an effort to improve awareness through E-Government, NRCS has taken the initiative to use a customer database to distribute pamphlets, posters and program information to underserved communities. This effort will increase the Agency's distribution efforts by 75%. • NRCS' Technical Service Providers policy provides guidance on unforeseen concerns on certification requirements, non-governmental and community-based organization participation, and coordination with minority serving colleges and universities, and tribal entities. • NRCS contributed \$50,000 towards various Hispanic Serving Institutions for support of student tuition, room & board and other fees. • NRCS contributed \$10,000 towards the USDA-initiated annual NAACP

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			<p>conference. NRCS participated and provided staff support in the distribution of 500 agency program packages, including program fact sheets and outreach coordinator contacts. This effort provided agency awareness to over 5,000 conference participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRCS participates on the USDA Black Farmer Summit Planning Committee. This committee focuses on the concerns of farmers located in the Black Belt regarding product marketing, land loss issues, participation and eligibility in USDA programs, etc. The committee is planning its first forum for early FY 2004. • NRCS performed major roles in all 12 USDA Farm Bill Forums held across the Nation and the U.S. territories, designed to provide awareness and reach the historically underserved populations. NRCS sponsored and coordinated the forums held in Mississippi, and California, in addition to partnering with Mississippi Valley State University and California State University at Fresno, respectively. On the average over 300 minorities, small and limited resource farmers participated in the forums and agency presentations. • NRCS participated, provided assistance and research with minority employee organizations, community-based organizations and minority-serving institutions that serve as partners to increase program outreach efforts to include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Intertribal Agriculture Council; ➤ American Indian Higher Education Council; ➤ 1890, 1994, APA and HSI's in implementation of the NRCS Soil Science and Scholars programs; ➤ National Organization of Black County Officials;

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Rural Coalition; ➤ Federation of Southern Cooperatives; ➤ National Council for Science and the Environment; ➤ Professional Agricultural Worker's Conference Advisory Board; ➤ National Hmong Conference; and ➤ Agency recognized Employee Organizations. • NRCS participated and provided assistance, staff support and training to all of the National Employee Organizations representing Asian/Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Hispanics, and Blacks. • NRCS participated and provided educational information to over 30 minority farmers relating to Farm Bill Programs as EQIP, CSP and others in Georgia, with participants from Alabama and Florida.
<p>3 <u>Employment.</u> Provide a workplace free of discrimination and enhance the diversity of the workforce.</p>	<p>3.1 Take affirmative steps to recruit, hire, train, and promote employees from diverse backgrounds</p>	<p>3.1.1 The Agency uses Federally-mandated plans to: A. assess under-Representation B. target improvement, And C. develop and implement effective strategies for improving diversity.</p>	<p>The NRCS work force increased by 286 employees from October 1, 2002 to August 3, 2003. NRCS hired 56 White males, 93 White female, 68 Hispanic males, 23 Hispanic females, 26 Asian American/Pacific Islander males, 25 Asian American/Pacific Islander females, and 1 American Indian/Alaska Native male. NRCS lost 3 Black males, 4 Black females and 2 American Indian/Alaska Native males.</p> <p>NRCS largest percentage change was for Hispanic males who increased their overall representation by 0.5 percentage points. White females, Hispanic females, Asian American/Pacific Islander male and Asian American/Pacific Islander females increased their representation in the work force by 0.2 percentage points.</p>

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		<div>3.1.2 The Agency: A. identify barriers, and B. take affirmative steps to remove barriers to workforce diversity</div> <div>3.1.3 Conduct employee, committee member, and volunteer Civil Rights training to improve awareness, understanding and appreciation for workforce diversity. Training is to include alternative dispute resolution and disability.</div>	<div>Table 1. Total Workforce Demographic Profile for the End of FY 2002 to August 3, 2003</div> <table><tr><th></th><th>Total</th><th>White M</th><th>White F</th><th>Black M</th><th>Black F</th><th>Hisp M</th><th>Hisp F</th><th>AA/PI M</th><th>AA/PI F</th><th>AI/AN M</th><th>AI/AN F</th></tr><tr><td>CLF</td><td>100</td><td>46.0</td><td>42.9</td><td>35.3</td><td>4.9</td><td>5.4</td><td>4.8</td><td>3.3</td><td>1.5</td><td>1.3</td><td>0.3</td></tr><tr><td>End of FY 02</td><td>11,827</td><td>3,485</td><td>7,179</td><td>2,846</td><td>581</td><td>379</td><td>294</td><td>132</td><td>62</td><td>34</td><td>226</td></tr><tr><td>As of 8/3/03</td><td>12,113</td><td>3,621</td><td>7,235</td><td>2,939</td><td>578</td><td>375</td><td>362</td><td>155</td><td>88</td><td>59</td><td>227</td></tr><tr><td>%</td><td></td><td>29.9</td><td>59.7</td><td>24.3</td><td>4.8</td><td>3.1</td><td>3.0</td><td>1.3</td><td>0.7</td><td>0.5</td><td>1.9</td></tr><tr><td>Total # Change</td><td>286</td><td>136</td><td>56</td><td>93</td><td>-3</td><td>-4</td><td>68</td><td>23</td><td>26</td><td>25</td><td>-2</td></tr></table> <div>*Bold indicates under representation when compared to the civilian labor force (CLF).</div> <div>To sustain the capability of the NRCS Federal workforce, NRCS has taken a proactive corporate approach by implementing a comprehensive national recruitment strategy and outreach plan. NRCS identified “Global Mission, Local People” as the motto for its recruitment strategy. The recruitment strategy and outreach plan will allow NRCS to:</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Recruit highly qualified employees from a variety of agriculture-related and diverse organizations;Engage partners, organizations, underserved communities, and Indian Nations in the recruitment process;Utilize the recruitment incentives and hiring flexibilities to increase or retain the current workforce;Market NRCS positive mission and family-friendly work environment;Develop and maintain a skills database to capture information, such as education, training history, special skills, and certifications; andMaintain established employee development programs.</div> <div>In FY 2003, highly qualified minority candidates were given 16 recruitment</div>		Total	White M	White F	Black M	Black F	Hisp M	Hisp F	AA/PI M	AA/PI F	AI/AN M	AI/AN F	CLF	100	46.0	42.9	35.3	4.9	5.4	4.8	3.3	1.5	1.3	0.3	End of FY 02	11,827	3,485	7,179	2,846	581	379	294	132	62	34	226	As of 8/3/03	12,113	3,621	7,235	2,939	578	375	362	155	88	59	227	%		29.9	59.7	24.3	4.8	3.1	3.0	1.3	0.7	0.5	1.9	Total # Change	286	136	56	93	-3	-4	68	23	26	25	-2
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			<p>bonuses, 3 relocation bonuses, and 12 appointments above the minimum for superior qualifications.</p> <p>NRCS has a comprehensive National Recruitment Strategy and Outreach Plan which is intended to target diverse populations with the education and experience needed to fill skills gaps, anticipated over the next five years and beyond. This strategy engages conservation partners, diverse organizations, and underserved communities in the recruitment process.</p> <p>NRCS used recruitment incentives and hiring flexibility to increase its diversity in its current workforce and market its family-friendly work environment and progressive programs. These include: telecommuting, flexi-place, and flextime. NRCS have also streamlined its vacancy announcement system. NRCS produced a Student Employment Policy to standardize how students are treated in NRCS and the benefits they receive and a Mentoring Policy to provide guidelines for NRCS offices to use in establishing mentoring programs. The Agency also developed a Student Loan Repayment Policy.</p> <p>NRCS conducted a Workforce Planning and Skills Analysis to ensure that over the next five (5) years the Agency will maintain a diverse and skilled workforce to carryout the mission of the Agency.</p> <p>NRCS participated in a National American Indian Recruitment workshop held in Hulbert, OK at the Hulbert High School. Approximately 400 students, parents and individuals from the community were in attendance. The NRCS Outreach Division along with the Human Resources Division provided information on various positions, workforce statistics, training and educational opportunities.</p> <p>NRCS Soil Science Scholars Program continues to be a success. Five Soil Science scholars remain in the program that currently attends various 1890 Colleges and</p>

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			<p>Universities located in Virginia, Tennessee and Alabama. NRCS contributed and supported approximately \$450,000 towards scholarships, salaries, tuition, books and fees.</p> <p>NRCS is in the process of developing two scholar programs for 1994 Tribal Colleges and Asian Pacific American (APA) Serving Institutions. The Outreach Division is monitoring H.R. 4825 on the approval of the APA program as briefings continue in the House. NRCS plans to select 10 scholars, 5 from each of the new programs upon management and budgetary approval. NRCS continues to support and implement placement opportunities for an average of 25 scholar summer interns.</p> <p>The Hispanic Public Service Scholars (PSS) Program was launched in early spring 2002 and NRCS selected 3 students. An additional 5 students were selected this year although 1 student declined an offer. We currently have a total of 7 students in the PSS Program attending school in Puerto Rico, New Mexico and Florida. Summer employment locations are Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Maryland, Colorado and New Mexico. One student from the Hispanic Public Service Program has graduated and is currently employed by NRCS in NM and attending graduate school.</p> <p>NRCS is in the process of developing two scholar programs for 1994 Tribal Colleges and Asian Pacific American Serving Institutions. The Outreach Division is monitoring H.R. 4825 on the approval of the APA program as briefings continue in the House. NRCS plans to select 10 scholars, 5 from each of the new programs upon management and budgetary approval.</p> <p>NRCS used such programs as the Career Intern Program, the Administrative and Information Technology Trainee Program and the Workforce Recruitment</p>

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			<p>Program (WRP) for College Students with Disabilities to increase workforce diversity. NRCS has 130 career interns; 65 of these interns are women, minorities, or people with disabilities. NRCS Hired 23 WRP interns and 6 diverse administrative trainees during FY 2003. Over 60% of the students NRCS hired this year come from diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>NRCS hired 117 career interns since the program's inception in April 2002. NRCS also hired 23 people under the Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students for disability during FY 2002 and FY 2003.</p> <p>NRCS hired the first Hispanic female state conservationist in the history of the Agency.</p> <p>NRCS continues to be a lead agency in utilizing the USDA/1890 Scholars Program as a recruitment mechanism. NRCS selected 5 new scholars who will begin school in the fall of 2003.</p> <p>NRCS currently has a total of 18 USDA 1890 Scholars and interns, including 1 transfer scholar from the Farm Service Agency.</p> <p>NRCS prepared and distributed a list of selected colleges and universities and an annual Events Calendar of career fairs and conferences to Human Resources Specialists throughout the Nation. These specialists attended various career fairs of diverse organizations; these included: The National Hispanic Environmental and Energy Conference, the American Council of the Blind, Federally Employed Women, Blacks In Government, Minorities In Agriculture and Natural Resources and Related Sciences and American Indian Science and Engineering Society, etc.</p> <p>NRCS revised its brochure on challenging careers, developed "Recruitment</p>

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			<p>Incentives” and “Employment Brochures” and a recruitment display, with photographs of diverse NRCS employees carrying out mission-critical work. NRCS also made recruitment brochures and posters available in specialized formats and languages, e.g., Spanish and Braille.</p> <p>NRCS established a cross-functional team to develop a multi-level leadership development program to ensure continuity and excellence and a diverse leadership as projections indicates over 1/3 of the employees in leadership positions are eligible to retire in the next five years.</p> <p>NRCS provides updates and key instruction for the Orientation for New NRCS Employees, NEDC’s training modules on Program Delivery and Compliance, Working Effectively with American Indians and other national special emphasis program.</p> <p>NRCS Alternative Dispute Resolution Program led a 2-day joint training conference with the NRCS, Human Resources and Civil Rights Staffs creating a continuous open dialogue between the three entities.</p> <p>Approximately 263 employees attended ADR training sessions from October 1, 2002 to the present. This included 74 supervisors/managers; 184 non-supervisors/managers and 5 District employees.</p> <p>NRCS developed and implemented a comprehensive multi-level training program on reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities. This training program targets all supervisors and managers, civil rights and human resources staffs, and all employees. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission provided portions of this training and a nationwide satellite broadcast has also been scheduled.</p>

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			<p>NRCS provides updates and key instructions for the <i>Orientation for New NRCS Employees</i>, NEDC's training modules on <i>Civil Rights Compliance in Program Delivery</i> and <i>Working Effectively with American Indians</i>.</p> <p>NRCS supported training for all National Employee Organization Conferences in FY 2003.</p> <p>National SEPMs and the Civil Rights Staff provided training for State Civil Rights Advisory Committees in Rhode Island, Oregon, South Dakota, Ohio, and West Virginia.</p> <p>NRCS is developing internal and external outreach training based on individual and local needs. Implementation of training will be coordinated with various entities such as the Social Sciences Institutes, NEDC and public and private sector training firms. The training plan is 60% completed.</p>
	3.2 Conduct a comprehensive equal employment opportunity (EEO) evaluation program to assess employment policies and practices.	3.2.1 The Agency: A. takes preventive and corrective actions resulting from compliance reviews, and reports outcomes and actions taken.	<p><u>See Section 2 on Program Delivery.</u> NRCS compliance reviews are conducted jointly to assess the Agency's compliance with both Title VI and Title VII requirements. Eleven States received compliance reviews and over 600 field offices were reviewed in FY 2003.</p> <p>NRCS General Manual (GM) 230, Part 405 requires that States submit a corrective action plan to the Civil Rights Staff within 30 working days from the receipt of the Civil Rights Compliance Review. Corrective actions are submitted every 90 days until the action had been satisfied.</p>

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			Section 504 accessibility requirements have been the most common violation observed during compliance reviews. However, the majority of these violations were minor and were corrected on-site. States are directed to provide documentation reflecting accessibility violations identified and the need for re-mediation to the lease holders of the offices found to be in noncompliance.
	3.3 Manage an effective employment complaint processing program.	<p>3.3.1 The Agency:</p> <p>A. makes good-faith efforts to resolve employment complaints and workplace disputes at all times, early in the process,</p> <p>B. responds timely to requests for information from EEO counselors, mediators, investigators, and adjudicators, and</p> <p>C. submits EEO counselor's reports timely</p> <p>3.3.2 The Agency promptly implements preventive and corrective actions resulting from complaint</p>	<p>The NRCS Civil Rights Staff (CRS), Complaints Staff (CS) processes Employment Discrimination, Sexual Harassment and Program Participation Complaints. The processing of complaints is handled promptly and efficiently. Presentations are given to employees and managers regarding the EEO Process and the importance of communication, employee and management rolls and responsibilities in addition to treating each other with respect. When complaints are filed with the CRS the EEO Counselors seeks resolution at the lowest possible stage. This helps management to maintain a hostile free work environment and creates a win/win situation for all parties involved.</p> <p>Achieved a reduction in the number of informal complaints initiated from 100 in FY 01 to 85 in FY 02 to 58 in FY 03. Resolved 29 of the 59 informal complaints (58.0 percent) initiated in FY 03. Obtained 11 settlement agreements and 18 written withdrawals. Saved the agency \$2,610,000.00 through the informal complaints process.</p> <p>The NRCS actively pursues settlement of complaints through out the process. The staff developed a complaint analysis team to review and conduct analysis of formal complaint reports of investigations to facilitate settlement discussions of formal complaints.</p> <p>The NRCS staff is cogent to time sensitive documents. In most all occasions responses to the Department, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, US</p>

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		<p>findings.</p> <p>3.3.3 The Agency promptly implements terms of settlement agreements.</p> <p>3.3.4 The Agency analyzes trends in complaints; promptly implementing changes in policies and practices to avoid future complaints and ensure nondiscrimination.</p>	<p>Justice Department etc, are responded to in the timeframe allotted.</p> <p>NRCS has developed policy and procedures outlining guidelines to follow pertaining to EEOC's findings of discrimination. If there is a finding of discrimination by the EEOC, the NRCS will carryout its procedures immediately.</p> <p>Provided ongoing direction and oversight to ensure the fulfillment of negotiated settlement agreements. All settlement agreements were completed within the negotiated timeframes established in the settlements.</p> <p>NRCS conducts analysis of the complaint databases in efforts to decrease patterns and practices of discrimination. The analysis is used by management to increase employees' awareness and to eliminate potential barriers.</p> <p>NRCS developed a Civil Rights Newsletter to be disseminated through the agency to keep managers and employees informed of the latest information pertaining to CR and the EEO arena.</p> <p>The NRCS Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) staff mediates early resolution disputes, informal, formal EEO complaints and grievances. Mediations resulted in 92% resolution rate for early intervention and grievance issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ADR Program workplace dispute consultations (during the first three quarters of FY 2003) have increased by 33% from FY 2002. • All NRCS employees are provided the option to participate in an alternative dispute resolution process such as mediation when they are experiencing workplace conflict.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRCS employees who file an informal EEO complaint and elect ADR are contacted by the ADR office within 2 days of receiving a signed election form from the NRCS Civil Rights Staff. • Through June 30, 2003, 9 informal and 3 formal EEO complaints were referred to ADR resulting in a 75% resolution rate. • ADR has been instrumental in addressing program disputes. During FY 2003, 8 cases were referred to mediation with a 62% resolution rate. • NRCS ADR published its quarterly newsletter to NRCS employees. The ADR newsletter provides information on mediation; how to utilize the ADR program; ADR within the EEO and grievance process, and future training sessions. • NRCS ADR website is frequently updated and is accessible for persons with disabilities. • ADR and EEO posters are located in each NRCS office. In addition, ADR brochures were made available to all NRCS employees. • NRCS continues to offer other forms of ADR to address conflict. Through the use of facilitation, ADR has resolved 8 workplace disputes and has helped small field offices and work teams achieve a higher level of collaboration. In addition, one work-place facilitation was conducted for the Forest Service.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NRCS collateral duty mediators continue to receive advanced mediation training through a variety of professional sources. NRCS ADR program continues to share mediators and facilitators with other Federal government Agencies ADR programs which is a cost saving practice that benefits all USDA. NRCS ADR and the Forest Service Early Intervention Program (EIP) co-sponsored an "ADR Awareness Day". This program initiative led to a wider participation from the following USDA, ADR staffs: APHIS, FSA, FAS, REE, AMS, RD and FSIS. <p>NRCS employees continue to be informed of their options through Conflict Management Training (CMT) and ADR Briefings.</p> <p>NRCS Georgia provides resource assistance to Asian American chicken farm producers in Hart and Franklin counties. The Asian American Program Manager provided these producers Farm Bill 2002 information in an Asian language to reduce the language barrier.</p>
4 Procurement. Ensure equal opportunity for minority, women-owned and small and disadvantaged businesses in all USDA contracting	4.1 Take affirmative steps to increase procurement with minority, women-owned, and small and disadvantaged businesses.	<p>4.1.1 The Agency develops and implements effective strategies for improving participation by minority, women-owned, and small and disadvantaged businesses.</p> <p>4.1.2 The Agency:</p>	<p>The FY 2003 budget was not released until June 2003. Therefore, the issuance of contracts was delayed slightly until NRCS funds were approved. Fourth quarter totals in FY 2003 will reflect an increase in contracts and funds expended. Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act (JWOD) figures will be reflected in the JWOD Performance Plan for NRCS. The following depicts the total procurements for FY2003 (as of third quarter).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small Business - \$56,019,000 8(a) – \$3,930,000

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activities.		<p>X identifies barriers to participation by minority, women-owned, and small and disadvantaged businesses,</p> <p>X takes affirmative steps with the authority of the Agency to remove these barriers, and</p> <p>X takes affirmative steps to increase employment of persons with disabilities by procuring goods and services under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Disadvantage Business - \$10,925,000 • Women-Owned Business – 3,605,000 • HUBZone - \$1,440,000 • Veterans - \$0 • Small Business Set-Aside – \$21,389,000 • Total NRCS Procurements - \$109,677,000 <p>The 2002 Farm Bill expanded the availability of technical assistance to producers by encouraging the use of third parties—called technical service providers—to assist USDA in delivering conservation technical services to farmers and ranchers.</p> <p>Technical Service Provider Registry (TechReg), a new NRCS Internet application, will be available. TechReg makes it easy for technical service providers (TSPs) to register and become certified, and for USDA customers to find certified providers. TechReg provides a TSP locator, information about certification categories and criteria, on-line certification, and TSP progress reporting. The TechReg database already contains over 15,000 prospective TSPs. TSP's who register and become certified must also adhere to the Civil Rights laws, regulations, and procedures governing Title VI.</p> <p>NRCS released “not to exceed” payment rates for certified technical service providers. These rates were established for each State using NRCS' Technical Assistance Cost of Conservation Practices (TACCP) database, which reflects the agency's total cost to provide technical assistance for conservation practices. These payments rates will be provided to USDA conservation program participants to help them choose competitively-priced services from these</p>

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			<p>providers.</p> <p>The rates were established using NRCS' TACCP database, which reflects the agency's total cost to provide technical assistance for conservation practices. TACCP uses cost information of sub-state areas, which reflect common natural resource, regulatory, geographic, social and economic factors. These factors affect the time needed to plan and implement conservation practices.</p> <p>Barriers of awarding contracts to minorities, woman-owned, and small disadvantaged businesses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses do not always employ experienced personnel for their staff and must continuously recruit skilled personnel in order to perform the work of the contract; • Businesses must be in a position to obtain bonding; and • Contractors may lack the skills to market themselves to other government agencies. NRCS has designed training to enhance their skills in obtaining and retaining an experienced staff and understanding good business practices. <p>NRCS coordinates monthly teleconferences with SBC's to share information, and monthly vendor outreach meetings are conducted to communicate how to do business with NRCS. Management Services Division maintains an in-house vendor database that is shared with each SBC nation-wide.</p> <p>Contracting officers are continuously encouraged to utilize small business concerns whenever possible. In addition, they provide instructions to the Local Agency Program Coordinators for the Purchase Card Management System to train</p>

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			<p>cardholders on Small Business Program policies, regulations, and procedures.</p> <p>Training ensures that cardholders and contracting officers are aware of the impact of Federal procurement on small business concerns.</p>